

# REVIEWS

**KNOX-JOHNSTON ON SEAMANSHIP AND SEAFARING – Sir Robin Knox-Johnston.** Published in hard covers by Fernhurst Books [<https://fernhurstbooks.com/>] at £14.99. 220 150mm x 231mm pages but no photographs or other illustrations. ISBN 978-1-9121-7714-1

Sir Robin Knox-Johnston is a legend, an inspiration, even a hero. As the first person to sail singlehanded non-stop around the world by the three great capes of Good Hope, Leeuwin and the Horn he led the way in bringing sailing to the notice of the world. He has competed in some of the greatest ocean racing events, including the Whitbread, Jules Verne, Route du Rhum and, at the age of 68, the Velux 5 Oceans.

Starting out in the Merchant Navy, and with over 250,000 miles sailed aboard a wide variety of yachts, Robin has experience and knowledge that is hard to match. *Knox-Johnston on Seamanship and Seafaring* was brought out in June 2018 to coincide with the 50th anniversary of his departure from Falmouth on the Golden Globe Race, the event which shot him into the record books and saw the start of an illustrious career. It has an admiring foreword by Alex Thomson, after which Robin pens an introduction that considers the changes in boats, navigation and communications which have taken place over the past 50 years. It then comprises two main sections:

- **Part 1: Seamanship** – in which 26 short pieces cover ‘Skills’ such as using waypoints, obeying COLREGS, throwing a heaving line, and the art of anchoring; followed by another 13 pieces addressing ‘Gear’, including safety harnesses, leadline and sextant.
- **Part 2: Seafaring** – with a sub-section of 13 pieces on ‘Boats’ that includes *Cutty Sark*, the Metre Classes, Dunkirk Little Ships, MOD70 and of course, *Suhaili*; another covering ‘Races’ including the Velux 5 Oceans, Vendée Globe and the Round the Island Race; and a final sub-section of 10 pieces about ‘Places’ that have significant meaning for Sir Robin, such as the Southern Ocean, Durban, Bombay and Greenland.

I started this book with a high level of interest and enthusiasm – indeed, who wouldn’t? When Robin did a book signing in June 2018 in Falmouth the queue snaked down the street, with all copies of the book being sold before all would-be purchasers could be satisfied. Sadly, however, it failed to meet my expectations. Apart from the Foreword and Introduction there is no new writing here – it is a collection of Robin’s writings that appeared in *Yachting World* magazine. This in

itself is no bad thing, but according to the dust cover ‘you can benefit from Robin’s wealth of experience as he shares his thoughts ... in this new book’.

Much of the disappointment, and indeed frustration, could have been avoided if each piece had carried the date on which it was first published. This would have avoided the confusion that results when reading a piece which includes such phrases as ‘this summer’, ‘last year’, ‘at present’ etc. It would also have avoided such apparent *faux pas* as the statement ‘With modern anchors like the CQR ...’ when writing about the Art of Anchoring. Had we been told when the piece was written we would understand the reference to ‘modern’. OCC members might also take issue with his definition of a circumnavigation. It appears that, to Robin, you have only completed a ‘proper circumnavigation’ if you have sailed south of the three great capes as ‘A voyage that takes the sailor through the Suez or Panama Canal does not count’.

Having said all that, while the experienced sailor is unlikely to find many nuggets in Part 1, Part 2 has some interesting stories about Boats and Races. For me the Places sub-section did not spark except for an amusing story about visiting Lerwick.

So, as an anthology of Robin’s writing and to see how he has addressed sailing matters over a period of 50 years, the book has a place on the shelf. His love of the traditional ways comes through strongly, but his enthusiasm for the new is muted despite keeping pace with changes in technology and design.

Phil Heaton